

Sunday Column – Wow!
For publication 10.29.17

Friday, October 13, was a very lucky day for dogs, cats and rabbits in California. On that date the California Governor signed AB 485, the Pet Rescue and Adoption Act, into law. This is the first time that a state government has passed legislation to address the suffering caused by the mass breeding of pets for retail sale. In reaction to a Facebook post about this landmark event my emoji of choice was simply, Wow!

What the new law boils down to is that all retail stores engaged in the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits to the public must offer adoptable pets from shelters and nonprofit rescue groups instead of those purchased from breeders or puppy mills. The bill will take effect on January 1, 2019, giving small and large retailers a chance to regroup. Petco and PetSmart showed them the way years ago. Only a very few heartless and profit driven retailers have not followed suit. In California, at least these retailers will have to get with the times. The people have spoken through the legislative process.

Many times in my five years of writing this column, have I addressed the unspeakable suffering caused by the mass breeding of puppies in so-called “puppy mills.” A quick google search will reveal any number of stories detailing the horrors that have been uncovered when law enforcement is able to make a case against a puppy mill operation. It is extremely costly and even with plenty of evidence, local governments are hard-pressed to afford the cost of care for the animals while the case is tried. In order to move forward most have to bring in outside help from national rescue groups.

The animals used in mass breeding don't have a chance at life. They are confined in wire crates. Their feet are deformed from years of standing on wire. Their coats are matted from lack of grooming and the fact that other dogs are kept in wire crates above them. They only come out of their crates to be bred. They are often left untreated for parasites or other communicable diseases. It is a fate worse than death.

Over 240 cities across the U.S. have enacted retail pet store sales bans. Four of these were cities located in Georgia, no doubt in response to the “Petland” bill that was presented during the 2017 Georgia legislative session.

The “Petland” bill, if and when passed, would prohibit cities from enacting retail pet store bans. The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council has vowed to bring the bill back to Georgia in 2018. We're ready in spite of the fact that we are completely outgunned by the sheer number of lobbyists they have placed at the Georgia State Capital. Local governments don't like the bill. They don't want to be told what they can't do and they are showing up for this fight.

According to Patrick O'Donnell, Assemblyman from Long Beach, CA, the pet store sales ban has two primary goals. One is to reduce support of large-scale breeding facilities which keep animals in deplorable conditions. This level of inhumanity can exist only if the market supports it. Puppy mills generally don't sell directly to consumers. They don't want consumers to see their operation, keeping us blissfully ignorant. By removing the middleman these sales will plummet.

The second goal is to reduce the \$250 million dollar annual cost to house and euthanize animals in California shelters. If the market is redirected to rescue puppies then adoptions will increase and length of stay in shelters, and euthanasia, will both decrease.

If you are thinking of getting a new puppy, please, please, please consider adopting one from your local shelter. If your heart is set on a purebred puppy there are many reputable breeders out there to choose from. Do the research. You will know you're on the right track if they want you to see their facility and personally choose your puppy.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.